

## **Applying for Admission**

**A. HOW TO APPLY**

The policy of the OCHA is to ensure that applicants are treated in a fair and consistent manner.

Pre-applications are taken to compile a waiting list. Due to the demand for housing in the OCHA's jurisdiction, the OCHA may take applications on an "open enrollment" basis, depending on the length of the waiting list.

Families wishing to apply for any of the OCHA's programs may request a pre-application to be completed when the waiting list is open.

The application process will be undertaken in two phases: a preliminary application (referred to as a pre-application) will be taken first. When the family comes to the top of the waiting list and the OCHA is ready to pull the family into the applicant pool for final eligibility determination, the OCHA will take a formal application (referred to as a full application) and verify the information provided.

**Acceptance of Pre-applications:**

When the waiting list is open, interested persons may apply to the OCHA.

Any applicant asking to be placed on the waiting list for Housing Choice Voucher Program will be given the opportunity complete a pre-application as long as the waiting list is open and the OCHA is accepting applications.

If the waiting list is open, pre-applications may be distributed as determined by the OCHA.

Duplicative active pre-applications or applications will not be honored.

Individuals who have a physical impairment, which would prevent them from obtaining an application in person, may have someone else secure an application for them.

The OCHA has a system in place to assist families with disabilities. Families can contact the OCHA at the TDD/TTY number for information assistance to the hearing impaired.

The OCHA may also take preliminary applications at designated outreach sites as it determines necessary to comply with special outreach efforts.

Pre-applications do not require an interview, but full applications do.

**B. OPENING/CLOSING OF APPLICATION WAITING LIST**

If the OCHA is taking applications on an open enrollment basis and determines that the waiting list is too long, the OCHA will utilize the following procedures for closing and opening the waiting list.

Required notices will provide potential applicants with the necessary information to apply for assistance, including an OCHA telephone number to call, dates and times during which applications will be accepted, and a brief program description, including information on eligibility requirements and local preferences.

Applications will only be accepted from applicants during the advertised periods of enrollment. These enrollment periods are determined based upon the need of the OCHA to augment its waiting list for any of the programs.

### **Suspension of Application Acceptance:**

If the OCHA is taking applications on an open enrollment basis, the OCHA may suspend the taking of all applications if the waiting list is such that additional applicants would not be able to receive a Housing Choice Voucher within 24 months. The OCHA determines how long the list remains open. Suspension of application acceptance is announced publicly, as is the case for opening the waiting list.

There are specific instances where the OCHA may accept pre-applications even if the waiting list is currently closed. In cases where there are resident applicants who are being permanently displaced by governmental action of an OCHA member jurisdiction due ONLY to reasons of health or safety, the OCHA shall accept a pre-application from applicants who claim such preference within 120 days before or after their date of permanent displacement. The OCHA shall accept such pre-applications, but the OCHA shall not issue Housing Choice Vouchers to such eligible applicants in excess of ten percent (10%) of the OCHA's monthly turnover of Housing Choice Vouchers. In addition, applications may be submitted in accordance with HUD rules and regulations for Special Housing Programs, such as the Family Unification and Mainstream Programs, where the OCHA has exhausted specific program clients from its existing waiting list.

### **Reopening of the List:**

If the waiting list is closed and the OCHA decides to open it, the OCHA shall publicly announce the opening in the manner provided by federal regulation and the notice provisions contained in this document.

This action is taken utilizing the following procedures:

- Notice in newspaper of general circulation
- Posting such notice in plain view in the applications office
- Notice published in minority media publications in the OCHA's jurisdiction

The OCHA will publish the application date(s) and program(s) for which applications are opening in English, Spanish and Vietnamese newspapers serving the OCHA's jurisdiction.

The publication will also specify the location where applications are accepted. Generally, applications will be accepted at the OCHA office in Santa Ana or other designated locations.

The OCHA will send the announcement to agencies whose clients are very-low-income. Announcement flyers will be available in the front office of the OCHA.

Application instructions will be posted in the OCHA office, in other designated offices and available through the voice mail system and web site.

The closing date of the application process may be determined at the same time that the OCHA determines to open enrollment. The open enrollment period shall continue until such time that the list includes sufficient applicants for 24 months of operations.

## **C. PRE-APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

The OCHA will utilize a basic pre-application form. The information is to be completed as directed by the OCHA.

The purpose of the pre-application is to permit the OCHA to conduct an initial assessment of family eligibility or ineligibility and to determine placement on the waiting list.

Once the application is complete, the OCHA staff will assess the applicant's eligibility or ineligibility for selection as a Housing Choice Voucher Program participant.

The information on the form will not be verified until the client has been selected from the application pool for final processing. Final eligibility and placement on the list will be determined when the full application process is completed and the information verified.

Applicants are responsible for informing the OCHA of changes in family circumstances (i.e. income/assets, family composition, address, and living situation) within 15 calendar days and are responsible for responding to requests from the OCHA to update pre-applications.

Failure to provide information or respond to pre-application update requests may result in the applicant being removed from the waiting list. When applicants are notified in writing that their application has been rejected, the OCHA will follow the policy contained in Chapter 23 of this document.

#### **D. NOTIFICATION OF FAMILY STATUS**

Based on the information on the pre-application, if the family is preliminarily determined eligible, the applicant will be informed of the probable date that they will be contacted to determine if they are eligible to receive a Housing Choice Voucher. The OCHA communication will in no way lead applicants to believe that the estimated date of the Housing Choice Voucher issuance is exact, but will stress that the estimated date of the Housing Choice Voucher issuance is subject to several factors that are beyond the OCHA's control (i.e. preference determination, turnover, additional funding, etc.)

This information with respect to eligibility and estimated time -period to receive a Housing Choice Voucher will be put in writing and given to the applicant at the time of the interview or mailed to the applicant.

#### **E. COMPLETION OF FULL APPLICATION**

Applicants on the waiting list will be requested to fill out a full application when the OCHA estimates that a Housing Choice Voucher can be issued within 60 days.

Once the applicant's name is reached on the waiting list, notification will be mailed to the applicant. The applicant will be scheduled for an initial interview appointment.

The OCHA will interview the applicant by asking questions and completing a full application including a completed self-disclosure form. Families are encouraged not to bring children to the interview.

#### **Requirement to Attend Scheduled Meeting:**

It is the responsibility of the applicant to attend the scheduled application interview. It is the applicant's responsibility to reschedule the interview if they miss the appointment. Rescheduled appointments must be requested in writing within one year of the original appointment day.

If the applicant does not reschedule and/or misses two scheduled meetings, the OCHA has the right to reject the application.

Rejection of the application means that the household will be removed from the waiting list and must reapply when applications are being taken. Applicants will be notified in writing if the application is rejected for this reason.

All adult family members 18 years of age and older are required to attend the interview with the head of household and sign the housing application. Exceptions are made for the severely handicapped or students attending school out of state, in which case the paperwork will be given to the family to complete and return.

**Verification of Full Application Information:**

Information provided by the applicant will be verified in accordance with the provisions outlined in Chapter 9 of this document, including information on family composition, income, assets, allowances and deductions, preference status, full-time student status, and other factors relating to eligibility determination before the applicant is issued a Housing Choice Voucher.

All adult members 18 years and older must sign the HUD 9886 Release of Information Form, the OCHA's Release Form, property disposition, and INS 214 Declaration in order for the application to be considered complete.

**F. FINAL DETERMINATION AND NOTIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY**

Only one Housing Choice Voucher will be issued per application.

After the verification process is completed, the OCHA makes its final determination of eligibility, based on the same factors used in determining preliminary eligibility, but with verified data at this point in time.

The household is not actually eligible for Housing Choice Voucher issuance until this final determination has been made, even though they may have been preliminarily determined eligible and may have been listed on the waiting list.

Family circumstances may have changed between initial pre-application and final eligibility determination. Because HUD can make changes in rules and regulations during the review process, which affect an applicant's eligibility, it is necessary to make a final eligibility determination.

**G. PREFERENCE DENIAL**

If the OCHA denies a preference claimed by the applicant, the OCHA will notify the applicant in writing of the reasons why the preference was denied and offer the applicant an opportunity for an informal review within 15 calendar days of such determination.

If requested, the informal review must be conducted by any person(s) designated by the OCHA.

The designee may be an officer or an employee of the OCHA, other than the person who made or reviewed the determination. At the time of the informal review, the applicant must provide proof of the claimed preference for which they are eligible.

